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On
The Birthday of Shakespeare.

By
Bolton Corney.

Privately Printed - 1864.

(*Private impression.*)

AN ARGUMENT ON
THE ASSUMED BIRTHDAY OF SHAKSPERE:
REDUCED TO SHAPE A.D. 1864.

"A cunning man did calculate my birth."—W. S.

By BOLTON CORNEY, M.R.S.L.

The place and date of birth are the first requisites in biographic composition. The more eminent the man whose course of life prompts our curiosity, the more earnest is our desire to establish those particulars on conclusive evidence. This instinctive desire needs no apology. It implies a heartfelt love of race, and it leads to important results. The possession of those facts is both an incitement to research and a clue to discovery. Deprived of such aid—our cherished convictions, our sagacious inferences, and our ingenious conjectures, may be no better than day-dreams.

We have much reason to rejoice, with regard to Shakspeare, that evidence on those points has been preserved. The register-book of Stratford-upon-Avon records the baptism of a William Shakspeare, and the monument in the parish church identifies the child as *our* William Shakspeare. If we have not the date of his birth, we have an approximation to it. Here follows the precious evidence—the baptismal

extract *entire*, and the monumental inscription as far as it relates to the question about to be argued:—

“1564. *April 26. Gulielmus filius Johannes* [sic] *Shakspere.*” [J. P. C.]
 “Obiit. Ano. Doi. 1616. *Ætatis 53. Die 23. Ap.*” [F. W. F.]

To the above facts must be added, as next in value, the printed evidence of 1623. Ben. Jonson therein apostrophises our dramatist as the *Sweet Swan of Aron*, and Leonard Digges attests the existence of the *Stratford monument*.

How opposite was the fate of one of the most renowned contemporaries of Shakspeare! When the learned Mayans wrote a life of Cervantes, he could neither discover the place nor date of his birth, nor the date of his decease. Madrid, Sevilla, Esquivias, and Lucena, were named as his birth-place on *conjecture* or *tradition*. It was afterwards proved that he was born at Alcalá de Henares.

But while we rejoice in the possession of important evidence, it behoves us to scrutinise the current interpretations of it. The reports and inferences of the numerous writers on Shakspeare and his works, even when dependent on the same authority, often reveal discordancies of which cursory readers can have no just conception.

This remark shall now be exemplified. If we except the incidental evidence of the folio of 1623, and the observations of those who express no decided opinions, the statements of the earlier writers as to the place and date of birth of Shakspeare may be reduced to three classes. I reserve for a fourth class, which far outnumber the others, those who assert that he was born on the 23 *April* 1564.

The four classes of biographers must be briefly described. The figures which follow the names denote the date of publication, and the capitals which follow the dates are the initials of the titles of the respective works. S. indicates the *plays* or *works* of Shakspeare.

Class I. W. S. was born at Stratford-upon-Avon. Sir William Dugdale, 1656. A. W.—Thomas Fuller, 1662. W. E.—Edward Philips, 1675. T. P.—Gerard Langbaine, 1691. E. D. P.—Sir T. P. Blount, 1694. D. R. P.—*Class II. W. S. was born at Stratford-upon-Avon in April 1564.* Nicholas Rowe, 1709. S.—Thomas Birch, 1739. G. D.—Thomas Birch, 1752. H. I. P.—Philip Nichols, 1763. B. B.—D. E. Baker, 1764. C. P.—Chaudon et Delandine, 1804. N. D. H.—Alexander Dyce, 1832. P. S.—Thomas Campbell, 1838. S.—*Class III. W. S. was born at Stratford-upon-Avon the 16 April 1564.* Isaac Reed, 1782. B. D.—Stephen Jones, 1812. B. D.—*Class IV. W. S. was born at Stratford-upon-Avon the 23 April 1564.* Joseph Greene, 1773. S.—Edmond Malone, 1778. S.—Edmond Malone, 1785. S.—Edmond Malone, 1790. S.—Edmond Malone, 1793. S.—George Chalmers, 1797. A.—George Chalmers, 1799. S. A.—Edmond Malone, 1803. S.—Alexander Chalmers, 1805. S.—R. B. Wheler, 1806. H. St.—Alexander Chalmers, 1810. W. E. P.—R. B. Wheler, 1814. G. St.—John Britton, 1814. R. on Sh.—Alexander Chalmers, 1816. G. B. D.—Nathan Drake, 1817. Sh. etc.—John Britton, 1818. R. on Sh.—F. P. G. Guizot, 1821. S.—R. B. Wheler, 1824. B.-P. of Sh.—William Harness, 1825. S.—A. F. Villemain, 1825. B. U.—James Plunatre, 1828. M. of Sh.—David Brewster, 1830. E. E.—Thomas Campbell, 1838. S.—A. F. Villemain, 1838. E. sur Sh.—Philarrète Chasles, 1838. D. de la C.—E. J. B. Rathery, 1844. E. des G. du M.—Thomas Campbell, 1848. S.—F. P. G. Guizot, 1852. Sh. etc.—A. F. Villemain, 1858. Ét. de L.—F. P. G. Guizot, 1860. S.—J. R. Wise, 1861. Sh. B.-P.—J. C. M. Bellew, 1863. Sh. H.—T. B. Shaw, 1864. H. E. L.—C. C. Clarke, 1864. S.

I preserve the above lists, though far from complete, as proofs of the extent to which authors prefer transcription to research, and of the readiness with which a novel assertion obtains acceptance in the world of letters when introduced by a man of note. To examine those publications was a task, but no waste of time. It has enabled me to affirm when the 23 *April* was first named in print as the birthday of Shakspeare; and I have to state the circumstances under which the fact or fiction made its appearance.

We must pass from *Mr. William Shakespeares comedies, histories, and tragedies*, as published in 1623, to the edition of Nicholas Rowe, published in 1709, for a memoir of our dramatist. The editor says, "He was born at Stratford-upon-Avon, in Warwickshire, in *April 1564*"—which was

then a novel fact—but for the date of his decease refers to an engraving! The editions of Pope in 1725, of Theobald in 1733, of Hanmer in 1744, and of Warburton in 1747, were not productive of any additional information.

In the year 1765, nine years after proposals for the publication had been circulated, came forth *The plays of William Shakespeare, with the corrections and illustrations of various commentators*, and notes by Samuel Johnson, in eight octavo volumes. George Steevens esquire was a contributor to the appendix. In the memoir of Shakspeare by Rowe, which follows the prefaces, the dates are left unamended.

In 1773 came out, entitled as above, the triumphant edition of Samuel Johnson and George Steevens, in ten volumes. Steevens, be it observed, was the sole editor. A portion of one of the new illustrations which the volumes contain must now be repeated, as it includes the *first printed assertion of the birthday of Shakspeare* :—

† “Baptisms, marriages, and burials of the Shakespeare family; transcribed from the register-book of the parish of Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire.

¹ Jone, daughter of John Shakspeare, was baptized Sept. 15, 1558.

Margaret, daughter of John Shakspeare, was buried April 30, 1563.

² WILLIAM, son of John Shakspeare, was baptized April 26, 1564.
etc. etc. etc.

† With this extract from the register of Stratford, I was favoured by the Hon. James West, esq. STEEVENS.

¹ She married the ancestor of the Harts of Stratford.

² *Born April 23, 1564.*”

The *extract* was made by the rev. Joseph Greene, B.A. master of the grammar-school at Stratford, for his patron James West esquire, P.R.S. who died in 1772. This fact, with which Malone had not become acquainted in 1790, was announced in the posthumous edition of 1821.

In 1778 came out a second edition of the same work, revised and augmented. Edmond Malone esquire was one of the contributors. In this edition we have the extract

from the Stratford register as in 1773, and to the words of Rowe, "He [W. S.] died in the 53d year of his age," we have this note: "He died on his *birthday*, April 23, 1616, and had exactly completed his fifty-second year.—MALONE."

In 1780 Malone published a *Supplement* to the edition of 1778, in two volumes. This work contains additional notes; the poems of Shakspeare annotated; and the seven spurious plays, also annotated. It has no additions to the memoir of Shakspeare, but one note must be transcribed. It is an answer to some conjectures of Oldys and Malone:—

"As all that is known with any degree of certainty concerning Shakspeare, is—that he was born at Stratford upon Avon—married and had children there—went to London, where he commenced actor, and wrote poems and plays—returned to Stratford, made his will, died, and was buried—I must confess my readiness to combat every unfounded supposition respecting the particular occurrences of his life."—STEEVENS.

Now, as Steevens had given publicity to the asserted discovery of the birthday of Shakspeare, may not the above declaration intimate that he doubted its reality?

In 1785 came out a third and revised edition of the ten volumes, much augmented with notes from the *Supplement* of 1780, and from other sources. It was conducted through the press by Mr. Isaac Reed, but submitted to the approbation of Steevens. It contains the extract from the Stratford register as in 1773, and the note on Rowe as in the edition of 1778, signed as before—MALONE.

In 1790 Malone ventured as the rival of the experienced and redoubtable Steevens. He produced *The plays and poems of William Shakspeare with the corrections and illustrations of various commentators*, in eleven closely-printed volumes. It was, as he assures us, the "labour of eight years." He repeats the note on Rowe *verbatim*; and in an elaborate list of the baptisms, marriages, and burials of the Shakspeare family, which he had extracted from the register at Stratford with *great care*, we read:—

“*William, son of John Shakspeare, was baptized April 26, 1564.*”
 [Note] “He was born three days before, April 23, 1564. MALONE.”

Malone had not the felicity of producing a second edition, but the note on Rowe, and the note on the Stratford register, were retained by Steevens in the edition of 1793, and by Reed in the posthumous edition of Steevens in 1803. The note on Rowe was also given *verbatim* by Alexander Chalmers in 1805, by Drake in 1817, by Campbell in 1838; and, in *substance*, by more writers than I can enumerate.

Hitherto I have been a mere chronicler, but shall now record some irrepressible feelings on the proceedings of the two principal actors in this scene—Steevens and Malone.

The conduct of Steevens with regard to the note on the baptismal item is very mysterious. The discovery of the birthday of Shakspeare more than two centuries after the event—a discovery which involves a *rare* coincidence of dates—is a circumstance on which a true-hearted lover of literature could scarcely conceal his gratification. Now, what says Steevens on the occasion? Not a word! Did he confide in the note? Or did he doubt its authority? I submit those enigmas for solution.

The conduct of Malone is far from commendable. He adopts the substance of the nameless note without any inquiry into its credibility, expressing it in the most peremptory manner; and while he quotes the monumental inscription as evidence that Shakspeare died on the 23 April, contradicts it as to the year which, on the same undeniable evidence, he had reached at the time of his decease!

I have traced the *birthday assertion* of Greene to its first publication by Steevens in 1773; have proved its adoption by Malone in 1778; and shall proceed to inquire whether a certain annotated volume of earlier date may not have furnished the prototype of the contested discovery.

On disputed points, priority of statement is a question of

importance. When was the *Langbaine* of W. Oldys made accessible at the British Museum? Was Greene ever admitted as a reader? When was Malone admitted? Mr. Panizzi favored me with replies to those queries, as far as the official documents of the period avail, and I felt secure. The order is—Oldys, Greene, Malone.

WILLIAM OLDYS, an ardent inquirer on many subjects, a meritorious contributor to biography and bibliography, and an active note-writer in books of repute, was for some time librarian to the earl of Oxford, and in 1755 was appointed Norroy king-at-arms. He died in 1761.

The *Account of the English dramatick poets by Gerard Langbaine*, printed at Oxford in 1691, is one of the books which Oldys annotated. It was obtained by the rev. Thomas Birch, and is now in the British Museum, c.28.g.1. Langbaine prints the Stratford inscription thus:—

Obiit An. Dom. 1616.

Æt. 53. die 23. Apr.

So master Oldys, in some non-lucid moment, underscores *die 23 Apr.*—subtracts 53 from 1616—and writes down 1563. He assumes that the words *anno ætatis 53* are equivalent to *vixit annos 53*, and that the words *die 23 Aprilis* refer to *anno ætatis*, instead of being the object of *Obiit*. Such is the process, *never before described*, by which the birthday of Shakspeare was discovered! No one can doubt as to the course of ideas by which our annotator was misled. He thus commences the life of Shakspeare:—

“[William] The son of Mr. John Shakespeare wool stapler was the eldest of ten children born 23 of April 1563 was brought up in his youth to his fathers business married very young the daughter of one Hathaway a substantial yeoman in his own neighbourhood” etc.

The above particulars, the inferences excepted, are derived from the annotated *Langbaine* before noticed. I have now to add, thanks to the welcome communication of the

rev. H. O. Coxe, the notes of Oldys and Malone on *Æt.* 53.—

“Consequently born in 1563.” O.—“He was born in 1564. This inscription led Oldys into the mistake. He died on his birthday and had exactly closed his 52d year.” M.

The note by Oldys justifies my censure on the mode in which he interpreted the inscription. I never met with a more curious example of complicated misconception. The note of Malone is in part printed.

JOSEPH GREENE, a native of Worcestershire, was educated at Oxford, A.B. 1734. In 1735 he was appointed master of the grammar-school at Stratford, which office he retained till 1771. He was patronised by the celebrated James West, P.R.S. and assisted him in his pursuits. In 1772 he was incorporated A.B. at Cambridge, and proceeded A.M. He held the rectories of Welford and Miserdine, both in Gloucestershire, and died at the former place, about four miles from Stratford, in 1790.

Greene united the qualifications and opportunities required in a collector of facts on Shakspeare, but we are not much indebted to him on *that* score. In 1747 he was in possession of the probate copy of the WILL of Shakspeare, but he did not ensure its preservation. In 1759 he wrote thus to Mr. *Urban*: “Shakespear died at the age of 53.”—which is an error in itself, and equivalent to the assertion that he was born in 1563! He is also the writer of the unauthenticated note—“*Born April 23.*”

Now the statements of Greene are identic with those of Oldys, and it is scarcely credible that a second person should commit the same *threefold error*, on so plain a subject, otherwise than as a consequence of transcription—but on that point there is no evidence. I shall merely remark that West and Birch held office in the Royal Society at the same time; were both trustees of the British Museum; and were both

noted for their attachment to history and biography. Greene, therefore, might have obtained a sight of the *Langbaine*.

EDMOND MALONE completes the above-named triad of critics, and I have now to describe his proceedings after the close of 1790. His editorial zeal soon revived. In February 1792 he issued the prospectus of an edition of *Shakspeare* in fifteen volumes, royal quarto, with a *new life*, and engravings by Heath after Stothard. This project was relinquished by the proprietors. On the 1 January 1795 he issued the prospectus of an edition in twenty volumes, royal octavo, with an *entirely new life*, which was described as nearly ready for the press. This second project had no better fate. The *Inquiry* on the Ireland papers followed in 1796, and so ended the visible labours of Malone on Shakspeare—a pamphlet on *The Tempest* excepted—till they came to light nine years after his death, under the editorship of James Boswell the younger, in twenty-one octavo volumes, London, 1821.

The progressive changes of opinion on the part of Malone are thus left unrecorded. We only know what he published in 1790, and what he wrote between that date and the termination of his career in 1812. I can therefore do no more than repeat the statements of the two periods.

“He [W. S.] died in the 53d year of his age.”—Rowe, 1709. [Note] “He died on his birthday, April 23, 1616, and had exactly completed his fifty-second year.”—MALONE, 1790.

“William Shakspeare was born at Stratford upon Avon, probably on Sunday, April the 23d, 1564.”—MALONE, 1821. [Note] “I say *probably*, because we have no direct evidence for this fact. The rev. Joseph Greene, who was master of the freeschool at Stratford, several years ago made some extracts from the register of that parish, which he afterwards gavé to the late James West, esq. They were imperfect, and in other respects not quite accurate. In the margin of this paper Mr. Greene has written, opposite the entry relative to our poet’s baptism, “*Born on the 23d;*” but for this, as I conceive, his only authority was the inscription on Shakspeare’s tomb—“Obiit año Doi. 1616, ætatis 53, die 23 Ap.” which, however, renders the date here assigned for his birth sufficiently probable.”—MALONE, 1821.

“William, son of John Shakspeare, was baptized April 26, 1564.”—

STRATFORD REGISTER. [Note] "He was born three days before, April 23, 1564. I have said this *on the faith of Mr. Greene*, who, I find, made the extract from the register which Mr. West gave Mr. Steevens; but *quære, how did Mr. Greene ascertain this fact?*"—MALONE, 1821.

A short comment on the above notes is all that can be required. Greene, as Malone conceives, made the birthday assertion on the sole authority of the inscription, and Malone adopted it *on the faith of Mr. Greene*—but the inscription contains no such evidence, nor can ten thousand repetitions of an unwarranted assertion add one jot to its credibility.

I shall now, in order to refresh the memory of the reader, give a summary of facts and fictions, with remarks—the subjects being SHAKSPERE, Oldys, Greene, and Malone.

WILLIAM, son of John Shakspeare, was baptised at Stratford-upon-Avon on the 26 April 1564, and died on the 23 April 1616 in the fifty-third year of his age. I have here said no more than the argument requires.

Oldys asserts that Shakspeare was born on the 23 April 1563, and that he died at the age of 53, A. D. 1616.—He converts the day and month of the decease of Shakspeare into the day and month of his birth; contradicts the parish register as to the year of his birth; and contradicts the monumental inscription as to his age at the time of decease. The assertions of Oldys, as testified by his handwriting, have no other basis than his own misconceptions.

Greene asserts that "*Shakespear died at the age of 53*"—which amounts to the assertion that he was born in 1563! He is also the author of the unwarranted note—"Born April 23."—He contradicts the parish register as to the year of the birth of Shakspeare; contradicts the inscription as to his age at the time of decease; and names the birthday without *one word of evidence*, or even the *pretence of tradition*.

Malone adopted the *birthday assertion* without due inquiry, and his subsequent admissions clearly amount to

RECANTATION. Now, it was *on the faith of Mr. Greene* that he had proclaimed in positive terms, and as his own contribution to the life of Shakspeare—"He was born on the 23 of April 1564."—I need not point out the conclusion: the stream cannot be more pure than its source. In plain terms, THE ASSUMED BIRTHDAY OF SHAKSPERE IS A FICTION.

It is more than five years since I declared my firm persuasion, on the evidence of the monumental inscription alone, that Shakspeare "was born *before* the 23 April 1564." I must now declare, after tracing the question through the printed materials of two centuries, that there is no substantial evidence of a contrary tendency—but, as Johnson remarks, "*Every man adheres as long as he can to his own pre-conceptions.*"

After tracing the birthday anecdote from its earliest announcement to its retraction, it seems fit to inquire whether such retraction has had its due effect; and this leads me from the writers of the eighteenth century to those of our own times. As the birthday assertion had flourished for forty years before the retraction of it was made public, its wide diffusion cannot create the least surprise.

But, in spite of retraction, the assertion has survived another forty years! What has given it this undeserved success? Careless editorship, in many instances; but other causes may have operated. Authors are rather averse to retraction, and sometimes even waste their wits in order to avoid it. Has a *positive assertion* been objected to on the score of defective evidence? The same assertion is re-produced as *probable*, on such evidence as can be devised; or we are told "it is as well perhaps to acquiesce in the old belief;" or it must be assumed "for the sake of unity in grateful associations."

I cannot admire that process in literature. It indicates a

want of confidence in the power of truth. It obscures the distinctive character of facts. It is unmanly evasion.

The points which I propose to examine are, 1. The interpretation of the Stratford inscription; and 2. The customary interval between birth and baptism. The two points strictly pertain to the argument in hand; and the authors quoted are requested to consider my comments as proofs that I am sensible of the influence of their writings.

1. *The interpretation of the Stratford inscription.*

While we complain of the paucity of documents on Shakspeare, it behoves us to interpret correctly those which we possess. With this truism in mind, I shall review the Stratford inscription. Oldys, Greene, and Malone, are now out of the question. I have to controvert the hypothesis of an eminent writer of our own time on his favorite theme.

“The inscription on his monument [the monument of W. S.] *supports the opinion that he was born on the 23rd April.* Without the contractions it runs thus: ‘Obiit Anno Domini 1616. Ætatis 53, die 23 Aprilis.’ And this, in truth, is the only piece of evidence upon the point.”—J. P. COLLIER, 1844.

This remark occurs in a note, and it seems to have been printed without revision. The inscription contains no evidence in favor of the assumed birthday. It refutes the assertion *sans réplique!* As Shakspeare died on the 23 April in his fifty-third year, he must have been born *before the 23 April* 1564. If to that inference we add the fact that he was baptised on the 26 April, we have before us all the evidence on the point which is now in existence.

The inscription, *mutatis mutandis*, occurs in six modes of arrangement:—

1. Sir Francis Vere. Obiit 28. die Augusti, anno Salutis 1608. ætatis suæ 54. (*Keepe*) 2. John Sibthorp. Ob. die 8 Februarii. anno ætatis suæ 38. Christi 1800. (*Britton*) 3. Robert Whalley. Ob. anno ætatis suæ 28. 18 die Augusti. anno Domini 1591. (*Blomefield*) 4. Bart.

Dodington. Ob. anno ætatis 60. Salutis 1595. die Augusti 22. (*Camden*)
 5. William Camden. Ob. anno Domini 1623. 9 Novembris. ætatis suæ 74.
 (*Keepe*) 6. William Judson. Ob. anno Domini 1575. ætatis suæ 24.
 Aprilis 25. (*Wood*) Clement Colmore. Ob. anno Domini 1619. ætatis
 suæ 69. Junii 18. (*Le Neve*) Anna Radcliff. Ob. anno 1659. ætatis 58.
 Maii 13. (*Keepe*) Blaise Pascal. Ob. anno 1662. ætatis 39. die 19
 Augusti. (*Alexandre Lenoir*)

In neither of the above forms do I perceive any ambiguity. The date of the month can admit of no other application than to the decease of the person recorded.

I shall therefore continue to interpret the Stratford inscription after my own notions, undaunted by the opposition of a king-at-arms—of a master of the Stratford grammar-school—and of two approved editors of the works of Shakspeare.

2. *The customary interval between birth and baptism.*

It was admitted as a fact, for more than forty years, that Shakspeare was born on the 23 April 1564: it is an undeniable fact that he died on the 23 April 1616. Such a coincidence, *rare* in itself, would be the more notable in a man whose life was a tissue of extraordinaries, and is so much the more adapted to call forth comments.

The coincidence, however, seems to have escaped suspicion before the public retraction of it—but I pass over inferior matters in order to examine, on the point in dispute, the observations of some biographers of recent date.

As the baptism is recorded on the 26 April, the birthday assertion and the interval of *three days* are convertible terms.

“It seems most likely that our great dramatist [W. S.] had been brought into the world only *three days* before he was baptized, and it was then the custom to carry infants very early to the font.”—J. P. COLLIER, 1844.

“The searchers after remarkable coincidences will be struck with the fact that Shakespeare died on his *birth-day*, and that his friend the earl of Pembroke died also on his birth-day, when he had lived just half a century.—Abp Williams was another eminent man of those times who died

on the anniversary of his birth-day. Somner the antiquary another. Sir Kenelm Digby is said to have been a third."—Joseph HUNTER, 1845.

"It is generally said he [W. S.] died on the anniversary of his birth, but this statement rests on a *very late tradition*.—(The earliest authority is Oldys in his MS. notes to Langbaine. *Note*.) At the same time it must be remarked that *three days* was often the period which elapsed between birth and baptism."—J. O. HALLIWELL, 1848; 1853.

William Shakspeare, baptised on the 26th April, 1564. And when born? The want of such information is a defect in all parish-registers. Baptism so immediately followed birth in those times, when infancy was surrounded with greater dangers than in our own days of improved medical science, that we may believe that William Shakspeare first saw the light only *a day or two* previous to this legal record of his existence."—Charles KNIGHT, 1854.

"If we trust a *faint tradition* that he [W. S.] died on the anniversary of his birth, we are to believe that he was born on the *23d of the month*; nor is the interval which this supposes between his birth and baptism inconsistent with the custom of the time."—Alexander DYCE, 1857; 1864.

If the authors of the above observations accept the birth-day assertion of Malone, why not state it as a fact? If they accept his retraction of it, why retain the interval of *three days*, which is the very substance of the previous assertion? I cannot reconcile this course with any principles of criticism which ever came within my ken. It is above me—so I must be content with plain subjects.

On the customary interval between birth and baptism I shall produce the rule of the period, and examples of the practice. The rule appears in *The booke of common praier. Anno 1559*. The examples are from the best authorities.

"The pastours and curates shal oft admonish the people, that they deferre not the baptisme of enfantes any longer then the Sonday, or other holy day, next after the childe be borne, vnlesse vpon a great and reasonable cause declared to the curate, and by him approued."—1559.

Examples. Anno 1566. Edward Alleyne. Born 1 Sept. Bapt. 2 Sept.—1579. Arthur Dee. Born 13 July. Bapt. 16 July.—1581. Catharine Dee. Born 7 June. Bapt. 10 June.—1586. Henry Hastings. Born 24 Ap. Bapt. 17 May.—1588. Brian Duppa. Born 10 March. Bapt. 18.—1592. Frances Dee. Born 1 Jan. Bapt. 9 Jan.—1595. Margaret Dee. Born 14 Aug. Bapt. 27 Aug.—1599. Oliver Cromwell. Born 25 Ap. Bapt. 29 Ap.—1605. Edmond Waller. Born 3 Mar. Bapt. 9 Mar.—1608. John Milton. Born 9 Dec. Bapt. 20 Dec.—1617. Elias Ashmole.

Born 23 May. Bapt. 2 June.—1626. Richard Cromwell. Born 4 Oct. Bapt. 19 Oct.—1632. Anthony Wood. Born 17 Dec. Bapt. 23 Dec.—1642. Isaac Newton. Born 25 Dec. Bapt. 1 Jan.—1701. William Emerson. Born 14 May. Bapt. 10 June.

With regard to the rule, there is nothing in it to justify the above observations. It is not over-strict, and it provides for exceptional cases. With regard to the practice, I shall exemplify it by the Dee family—the family chosen for the same purpose by Mr. Halliwell—but I reject Theodore, who was not born in England, and add Frances, who *was* born in England. The revised case stands thus: Arthur, 3 days; Catharine, 3 days; Frances, 8 days; and Margaret, 13 days. So the average interval is more than *six days*!

After this exposition, I shall venture to denounce the interval of *three days* as a mythic tale in the shape of history; and, as such, I consign it to oblivion.

I have no space for reflections on “the fleeting and uncertain breath of *tradition*”—had tradition any real connection with this argument—but further remarks are required on two of the authors quoted, in order to secure me from the reproach of contributing to the diffusion of error.

(1.) Mr. Hunter attempts to prove that men sometimes die on the anniversary days of their birth. No doubt! and perhaps in the proportion of 1 to 364. But he is unfortunate in his examples. I question *four* out of *five*: Shakspeare, the earl of Pembroke, W. Somner, and sir Kenelm Digby.

(2.) Mr. Charles Knight is no copyist. He thinks for himself on all occasions. So he rejects the interval of *three days* in favor of *a day or two*, by which novel conception he the more decidedly sets at defiance the Stratford inscription! The defects of parish registers, and the state of medical science, seem to have chiefly occupied his thoughts.

It would be useless to amplify this argument. I have

endeavoured to dissipate errors which have been accepted as facts, on questions of peculiar interest, for almost a century ; and have replied to every accessible statement which tends to subvert the authority of the Stratford register, and of the monument of our incomparable Shakspeare. If I should make no converts, I must be satisfied with having written honestly—impartially—disinterestedly.

FINIS.

Curiosities of Literature,

BY

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Illustrated

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